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ABSTRACT

Practical information and advice are presented on 16 considerations in the establishment of a campus writing center. First, six concerns related to planning are discussed: obtaining administrative and departmental support; securing funds from various internal and external sources; obtaining furniture, supplies, and instructional materials; locating a facility to house the center; employing faculty and peer tutors; and hiring a receptionist. Three administrative factors are then considered: providing release time for the faculty member who is to act as the director of the writing center; meeting the training needs of student tutors; and choosing between referral and walk-in systems of operation. Next, six housekeeping and publicity considerations are examined: the various forms needed by the center; the types of data that must be collected; the filing system needed to organize this data; methods of scheduling student conferences; hours of service; campus advertising; and the provision of workshops and other extension services. Finally, the possibility and benefits of using these guidelines for the establishment of a campus learning center, providing learning support for math and other disciplines, are discussed. (JP)

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Establishing and Maintaining a Writing Center in the Junior or Community College

It is clear that the writing center is rapidly becoming an important facet of almost every university and college. The field of writing center operation has left the stage of infancy: we now have a newsletter and journal devoted exclusively to writing center operation; regional conferences and professional organizations are growing; and publishers are beginning to produce books related to writing centers. But the writing lab is no longer a university phenomenon; junior and community colleges are establishing centers, and they report a high degree of success. Although quite a few factors militate against establishing a writing center in the junior or community college, a determined and creative faculty member can overcome these obstacles. There are sixteen areas pertinent to establishing a center on your campus, and I shall discuss each one separately, though they are of course inter-related.

SELLING THE IDEA:

Before beginning your project, it is desirable to obtain the support of your department and the administration. This involves selling the "idea" of a writing center. You would think that it is easy to convince the members of your own department that a center is necessary or even feasible, but the amount of initial opposition to your project can be surprising. Part of this opposition may arise from the fact that centers are commonly associated with remediation, and a fear on the part of some instructors that it might appear

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that they are failing at their jobs if a center is established. If such sentiment does exist, you may want to point out to your colleagues that a center actually makes their jobs easier by assuring that students are writing at higher levels of proficiency than they would otherwise.

You will need to convince both your chairperson and your colleagues that the center is an effective instrument in countering the so-called "literacy crisis" that we hear so much about. In fact, you can argue that the community college <u>needs</u> a center more than a four-year college does because the junior or community college sometimes attracts students with low competency levels who were unable to attend the university because of these levels. Because your college's admissions is probably based on open enrollment, the potential for attracting students with low competency levels is great. You might even argue that it is the <u>duty</u> of the community college to offer this service in order to be fully responsive to the needs of all students.

In fact, this is exactly the line of reasoning I would use in trying to convince the administration. Since your college is specifically service-oriented, it is easy to argue that a center is a necessary part of the essential service you offer to the public. You might point out to administrators that establishing a center is a concrete step and shows legislators and taxpayers that the school <u>is</u> doing something about literacy. Also convincing to administrators are statistics from other colleges indicating the rate of student use of centers each semester. Some administrators are not even aware that such centers exist. Offering them information about centers in other colleges, especially junior colleges, can be just the step necessary to convince them.

If you believe that you will meet intense resistance from your department

and the administration, you might consider first preparing a formal feasibility report. Anyone who teaches technical writing ought to be quite familiar with this type of report. It is simply a formal persuasive paper arguing for the implementation of your project. The feasibility report should be based on as much factual information as possible: projected cost, funding sources, physical location. You should include alternatives when possible: funds can come either from x, y, or z. In other words, you can construct your projected center on paper and then bring this to your chairperson and dean and say, "See, it can work." This is perhaps the most persuasive and professional manner of proceeding.

Finally, if all this seems to fail, you might simply create a center independently and see if the administration will accept the fait accompli. There is a legend about Norman Holland from State University of New York at Buffalo. I do not know how true it is, but the idea is what counts. Holland supposedly wanted to establish the Center for the Psychological Study of the Arts. And he did. He pirated a classroom, contacted the sign shop and had someone print a sign which reads: Center for the Psychological Study of the Arts. And that was that; his center was established. If you do something similar and are willing to spend the extra time without compensation, you might be able to show everyone after a semester how successful the center really can be, and thereby convince them to support you.

FUNDING:

Obtaining funding is perhaps the most crucial element in selling the idea of a center and in continuing to operate once it is established.

There are two funding sources: external and internal. Locating funds outside of the college community is not impossible, but it may become less likely in the new conservative political climate. Usually, external funding takes the form of a grant and is a one-time allotment. It is important not to rely on external sources for continual funding, but grants can provide the initial investment necessary to establish the center. External funding can be industrial, state-wide, or national.

Corporations and large businesses will occasionally award grants to educational projects that show a clear need. A corporation will base its decision on a "grant proposal," which you need to devise. If your school operates a Grants Office, the personnel there will assist you in devising proposals for all external sources. You might target the most likely businesses rather than sending out proposals blindly; telephone calls can help you decide which institutions are likely to accept your proposal.

You can also try state-wide funding agencies, which include community organizations and endowments administered through local banks. According to Dr. Peggy Jolly from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, "The two most popular and successful state agencies that fund requests for Writing Centers [in Alabama] are the Alabama Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy and the Arts Endowment for the Gulf States. The first is directed by Walter Cox (Birmingham Southern College, Birmingham, 35204); and the second by Robert Hollister (P.O. 54346, Atlanta, 30308). Both agencies require specific proposals, budgets, and justification, but both have a good record for providing support. Guidelines for these agencies can be requested from their directors" ("Funding a Writing Center," paper presented at the Southeastern Writing Center Conference, Tuscaloosa, Alabama).

Finally, you might also try federal agencies. Dr. Jolly suggests that "Currently, one of the most popular agencies for funding Writing Centers is the Support for Developing Institutions Project (SDIP) of Title III in the Department of Education. Several schools in Alabama are receiving funds from this program, including UAB which has been granted $450,000 over the past two years" (Ibid). Although it is possible to obtain grants from external sources such as these, it is important to remember that you cannot rely on them for continued support.

More reliable than external sources are internal, from within the college community. Again, the best method of proceeding is to devise a feasibility report before you approach the administration; this is akin to the grant proposal in external funding. There are two internal sources: your supporting department(s), and the college administration. Departmental funding is perhaps the most secure form of funding because once your center is established, the department is likely to support its continued existence more than the administration is; bureaucrats and legislators are always searching for so called "non-essential programs," and so they are more likely to question your need to survive if they are the ones who fund your center. Once your center has been created by some initial investment, you really will not drain too much money from your department's funds. It is the initial investment, then, that is the most important. Perhaps the most desirable situation is to procure an initial investment externally or from the general administrative fund of your school, and to be funded annually by your department, with occasional grants of "soft money" from the administration.

MATERIALS:

Stocking the center with adequate materials is dependent upon your

level of funding. You must have several tables -- round ones if possible. Many center directors agree that round tables are better than square or rectangular ones because they allow the tutor to sit close to the student or students rather than opposite them. The round tables facilitate the tutor's job and add to a more relaxed atmosphere. Often you can obtain this item from places within the college, such as the library, or cafeteria if you have one. Perhaps you can convince the library or cafe director to donate three or four tables. Obviously, chairs are equally important. It is probably best to avoid the wooden straight-back chair, and to opt for the molded-plastic cafeteria chair instead, or a cushioned chair ideally. I suggest these particular types of chairs and tables because it is important that students are made as physically comfortable as possible, especially since many will feel uncomfortable about attending the center in the first place. It is also necessary that your center have adequate lighting.

These three items -- tables, chairs, adequate lighting -- are the bottom line as far as materials. If you are under great financial pressure, it is possible to survive, though barely, with these few items; but there are several other materials you should try to obtain. A blackboard is immensely helpful in the center; we have five in ours. One or more bookshelves are handy because you probably will begin to collect resources: books, tests, exercises. (We have five large units.) A standard-size desk for a receptionist is useful. This desk can be situated just inside the doorway and can be used for making student appointments, schedules, and sign-ins. A filing cabinet is a great convenience because you will need somewhere to store student files and copies of diagnostic exams. You can definitely get by with a two-drawer model if you need to; and if you

have monetary problems, one of those large cardboard one-drawer models will suffice.

A few other items that you should try to obtain but which might be considered luxuries, are a wall clock, a t lephone, and some desk supplies: a stapler, scissors, etc. The clock is important when you have an appointment system and many students; the telephone enables students to call and make or cancel appointments.

Perhaps the most directly useful materials are the diagnostic and competence exams, and a collection of composition and English texts. You can accumulate a mini library of resources in your center by acquiring complimentary copies of recent texts from publishers and by soliciting from your colleagues all the old texts lying around their offices untouched. These books contain chapters and exercises that you can direct students to as a supplement to your individualized instruction. They also can be used as reference material for your tutors. You can use the diagnostic and mastery exams for diagnosing problem areas when the student first comes to the center and for determining whether the student has mastered those areas after instruction. You can use "before" and "after" test scores not only to determine student progress, but also to show administrators that the center itself is effective. You can do this by recording all before and after scores of all tests and by calculating rough mean scores at the semester's end: "Students exhibiting problems in certain areas averaged 60% on diagnostic exams and 95% on exit mastery exams this semester." You can also use these tests as practice exams. It is easy to construct diagnostic, practice, and mastery exams from composition workbooks, or to devise them yourself.

LOCATING A PHYSICAL CENTER:

Locating a physical center can be frustrating, especially if you are

restricted monetarily. As with the other topics I have discussed, locating a center will depend on the amount of support--both moral and financial--that you receive from the administration. The ideal center would be a new or renovated building, centrally located. For example, a trailer home could be used as a center, and is used on certain campuses. Some schools use small frame houses owned by the college. If your college is in the process of renovating a building, you may be lucky enough to requisition a suite of rooms.

If you are not in the position to acquire a new or freshly renovated structure, your best bet is to find an existing room or suite of rooms that you can adapt. You can get by with one room, but it is much better if you can obtain a suite, so that you can use one or two rooms for tutoring and another for a receptionist and waiting room. It is essential that you obtain a room that is neither cramped nor windowless. Too often writing centers are relegated to dingy, windowless, basement closets adjacent to the boiler room--hardly a propitious environment for learning. If the administration offers you the basement variety as your only alternative, it is probably best to be insistent about this point. Even a classroom transformed into a center would be better than a room which has the potential of stifling learning. In fact, your most likely target will probably be a classroom, or two adjoining classrooms. Convince your dean that one or two classrooms are not much to give up for such a good cause.

Perhaps the least desirable alternative for a center is a shared room--say, a corner of the library. Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama has created a center in a corner of their library, and this lab is quite successful. Perhaps in another year, Dr. Joyce Jolly will be able to convince Shelton administrators that her center is so effective that they ought to give her better quarters. But no matter what kind of quarters you obtain, it is

necessary, I believe, to try to make the atmosphere less pedantic and sterile, and more friendly and favorable to learning. Posters on the walls, for example, help make students feel that they are coming to a friendly place for some help and not to a "clinic" for "doctoring."

STAFFING

Staffing the center is perhaps the most difficult problem you in the junior and community colleges encounter. You have neither graduate students nor juniors and seniors. But you can overcome this obstacle. First, you can use faculty tutors. This procedure may or may not be a problem, depending upon your colleagues. Some schools arrange to have faculty members spend one or more hours per week in the center. Others provide release time: nine hours per week in the lab, for example, might be considered equal to teaching one course. There are all kinds of compensatory arrangements that you can make; but, of course, this usually entails both a departmental vote and an administrative decision.

Second, you can employ peer tutors. Many colleges and universities use peer tutors, and there are several different programs you can use. Tutors can receive work-study payment; they can receive a certain amount of credit hours for tutoring; or they can work as part of an internship, perhaps in English education. You may even be able to convince some students to work as volunteers. The advantages to having peer tutors are that they are economical, they often relate well to other students, and you have maximum control over your staff.

Third, you can solicit volunteer English teachers from local high schools. This is not as difficult as it may seem. Experience in individualized instruction is a marketable skill; many teachers are happy to gain this experience. Also, many are interested in the personal enrichment involved in working with college programs. And these teachers also may be interested in working with

you for the opportunity of acquiring ideas and methodology for their own classroom use. When I was directing a writing center in a northeastern university, our best tutor was a volunteer from a local secondary school.

Fourth, if your college is situated near a university or four-year college, you may be able to arrange to have English majors or graduate students from that institution work in your center on internships, partially fulfilling degree requirements from that institution. More and more colleges are requiring practical, on-the-job internships. If a nearby institution already conducts an internship program, it may be easy for you to convince those in charge to arrange a program with your school; if it has no program, your idea might be just the "fresh new idea" its administrators are looking for.

Finally, your center can operate with any combination of these four types of tutors. But whatever kind of staffing you eventually obtain, I suggest you request the maximum number of tutors. The more you ask for the more you are likely to receive. And for some reason, it seems as if you can always use another tutor.

ANCILLARY STAFFING:

If you want your center to operate at maximum efficiency, you will also need a receptionist or two. The receptionist answers the phone and makes and cancels appointments, thus freeing tutors to spend their time tutoring. The type of receptionist you obtain depends upon the type and level of your funding. If the dean has allocated you a budget, you might want to hire part-time help at minimum wage. Since no real skill is involved, you can even hire local high school students. Second, you can hire a receptionist through work-study if funds are available. In fact, if you use work-study peer tutors, the receptionist job is a good way to break in new tutors, gradually allowing them to work less as receptionists and more as tutors. Third, you

can use volunteers. It is possible to find students who will donate some of their time, especially with the promise of being allowed to tutor in the future.

Of course, it is possible to have your departmental secretary handle all appointments, but this may only add to your problems if you overburden her to the point that she cannot complete the work of your colleagues. It is least desirable to have the tutors themselves do the work of a receptionist, because it drains valuable tutoring time. Someone will have to handle appointments, and if you can find someone to work specifically at this task, your center will operate more smoothly than if you do not.

ADMINISTERING:

You will need a center director. The ideal situation is to have a full-time director--you or someone hired specifically for the job--who is responsible for all administrative tasks--devising schedules, training tutors, and so on--and who also spends some time tutoring. However, it is more likely that the director will be part-time and will be you or one of your colleagues. In return for the position you should receive two or at least one release time per semester; there is quite a bit of work involved and it is only reasonable to expect compensation. If your school operates on four terms rather than semesters, you might agree to one release time every two terms, or to some comparable arrangement. A third possibility is a co-directorship with split release time. You and a colleague would be joint directors and you would divide the release time between you; for example, your friend might have a release time during the second quarter, and you might have yours during the fourth. Whatever arrangement you choose, it is necessary to have someone who is in charge.

TUTOR TRAINING:

Tutor training is perhaps the director's most important task; this is

where you shape the type of center your school will have. Even if your tutors are faculty members, it is necessary to provide some guidance; consensus is important if your center is to be a unified and effective institution, rather than a fragmented and impotent one. Of course, you will not need to train faculty tutors in how to teach composition, but you will need to arrive at a common set of objectives for the center and clearly perceived operating procedures: will your center be an old fashion grammar lab, or a modern center which emphasizes the "writing process"? Even with faculty tutors, it is probably best to have a weekly meeting to discuss any problems that have arisen during the week.

In contrast, training peer tutors is an entirely different problem. You are especially limited because you have no juniors and seniors. Your best method is to select prospective tutors in their first quarter of freshman year and to ask them to attend a credit course on composition and tutoring methods, ideally taught by yourself. You can supplement this initial instruction with a weekly staff meeting designed to guide tutors while they are working as staff members. Some directors believe that it is best to select tutors who are ethnically and sexually representative of your student population, becuase they will be able to relate better to the students. It is also important to remember that English majors do not necessarily make the best tutors; a student with patience, a receptive and tolerant attitude, and a facility in explaining complex ideas will often be a better tutor than someone who simply has a good knowledge of the material.

If you cannot offer an initial course to prospective tutors, you might want to require that they pass the freshman English requirement with a certain grade; and you might wish to conduct an intensive one or two day training workshop before the semester begins. It might be a good idea to enlist the help of

your colleagues in this workshop. Not only is it a good method of using their expertise to help the cause, but it is also a way to help acquire their support in that you make them more involved with the center.

You yourself will have to determine the content of your training sessions--tutor training is a complex area--but there are a few topics I should mention: warn tutors against publicly disagreeing with a grade a student has received on a paper; caution them against proofreading someone's paper; ask them to avoid the temptation of making corrections and telling students what's what, rather than leading the student to the answer socratically or inductively; and encourage tutors to work only on one or two major problems at a time, rather than overloading the student with too much criticism.

OPERATIONAL SYSTEM:

Once you obtain tutors, a center, and materials, you need to decide what kind of system to operate. Most centers use a dual system: referral and walk-in. The walk-in system is one in which the center remains open during certain hours of the week for students who voluntarily solicit help. You can operate your walk-in program with an appointment system, in which students register to come in at a certain time; or you can post hours and work with students on a first come first serve basis. I believe that the appointment system is efficient because you can avoid "grid lock" during rush hours. And I believe that it is important to allocate some time for students who seek help on their own. Operating without any walk-in hours fosters the perception that the center exists solely for remediation.

The referral system is one in which a teacher may send a student to the center for assistance on a mandatory basis. The student must attend the center each week for a specified time period, usually one-half hour. Either the referring teacher or the tutors themselves (or both) can determine the duration

of the student's attendance during the semester. Some students can alleviate their writing problems in one or two visits; some need an entire semester or more. The referral system can be college-wide, in which any instructor from any department can refer a student to the center; or it can be department-wide, in which only English professors can refer students. You can probably make this decision incumbent upon how many tutors and how much support you have. It is probably best to use an appointment system for referral students for the same reason you would want to use it for walk-ins.

A third system you might consider is a credit course offered through the center. Some schools offer one, two, or three credit courses as a supplement to the standard English requirement. Usually, the center course substitutes for a nonexistent remedial English course. An entry placement test determines whether an incoming student needs the supplementary course. Although it is common to see these credit course arrangements, and although the courses seem to please administrators because they think they are getting their money's worth from you, I believe this arrangement attempts to make the center something it is not. The center is meant to be a place where students can obtain intensive individualized instruction. Your college should offer a remedial course in conjunction with the center, not through it; however, if it is the only way you can convince you dean to establish a center, then you might want to go along with it--at first.

FORMS:

Devising adequate forms is one of the initial tasks the director must perform. We are now turning to the field of business administration to discover ways to eliminate unnecessary or redundant forms and to make others more succinct. It is important to maintain adequate records while reducing the paper flow. Reducing the flow saves money and time; keeping records helps you to

justify your existence at the semester's end. You will need between two and six mimeographed forms.

You will need an information form, on which students can record their name, address, telephone number, and the English class in which they are currently enrolled. Some forms ask students to rate themselves in areas such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and related areas. However, one lesson we can learn from business administration is that we should not request information we will never use. Too many forms are clogged with irrelevant questions. Basically, all you need to know is how to contact each student should a scheduling problem arise.

You will also need a worksheet, on which tutors can record a brief summary of each student conference. The worksheet can be divided into five or six sections so that every time a particular student attends the center, the tutor can fill out a new section on the student's sheet, thereby monitoring the student's progress. The worksheet should also contain space for recording the amount of time the student spends with the tutor during each meeting, and a space for the tutor's name or initials. You can staple the worksheet to the information sheet, and this constitutes the core of the "student's file."

If you institute a referral system, you will need a referral form, so that instructors can notify you that they wish certain students to attend the center. This form should contain room for the insturctor's signature, the student's name, the class the student is having trouble with, the date, and a brief description of the problems the student is experiencing. You may also want to include a question asking the instructor how long he or she wishes you to work with the student. The referral form is what binds the student to weekly attendance and lets you know that you should send an absence notice to the student's instructor should that student miss an appointment.

The absence notice, usually on a half sheet of paper, merely informs the instructor that a referral student has missed an appointment. You may include a sentence asking the teacher to encourage the student to return to the center as soon as possible. Some centers include the threat of expulsion from the center should the student miss two consecutive appointments. Usually, this is done in order to place some pressure on the student to return to the center; rarely is anyone really expelled.

A fifth form, the weekly or monthly report, is optional. Some centers send periodic reports to instructors who have referred students. The report provides a summary of what areas the student has worked on, and indicates how many times the student has visited the center and the total amount of time the pupil has spent there. Some forms employ a checklist format, in which you simply check the pertinent areas (subject verb agreement, or fragments, say). Others leave room for a prose description. We use the latter because we feel it offers the instructor a more accurate and detailed report. However, if you are short of staff, the checklist may be a more reasonable alternative.

Another optional form is the center release: a notice informing the instructor that his or her referred student has conquered the specified problem areas and no longer needs center services. You can use a half sheet for this form, or you can eliminate the form by using a report form in its place.

Some centers use more forms than this, but it is to your benefit to keep the number low. It is essential, however, that you have at least an information form and a worksheet so that you can collect accurate data.

DATA COLLECTION:

Data collection is important because it is the principal means by which you will be able to justify your center's existence to administrators. I do

not want to stereotype administrators by saying they are only interested in figures; but if you want to prove to them that your center is successful, submit to them a report at the end of each term specifying exactly how many students attended, the total number of operating hours, and so on. This is the type of concrete information they need in order to judge the center's success and can use in requesting money from their superiors. You can also use this information to justify expansion--more tutors, better facilities.

There are five types of data you will need. First is the number of students who have attended during the term. You determine this number by counting the number of individual student files. Even if a student comes to the center for one short visit, ask the pupil to complete an information sheet. The more student files you accumulate, the more successful the center appears on paper.

An even more important bit of information is the number of student conferences. You determine this figure by counting all the filled-in spaces on all the worksheets. This figure is usually more impressive than the number of students attending because it can be three or four times as high. It would not be unusual to have, say, 200 individual students attending during the term, and 600 separate conferences.

The next figure you need is the total time spent in-conference during the term. This is why it is important to record the time span of each student conference on the worksheet. You calculate this number by adding all the time spans recorded on all the worksheets. This job will be easy if in the beginning of the semester you ask the tutors to round off each conference time they record to the nearest 15 minute mark, and if you periodically remind them to remember to record the time span of each conference. If you conduct conferences of roughly 30 minutes in duration and you see 200 students during the term for a

total of 600 conferences, your total time figure will be something like 300 solid hours spent in-conference.

A third datum you need to determine is the average time per conference. To arrive at this figure you simply divide the number of hours in-conference by the number of conferences. In our hypothetical case, it is 300 hours divided by 600 conferences, which equals 30 minutes. This number will vary from between 15 minutes and an hour.

A final bit of information you should collect is the number of hours tutors have spent in the center. Simply multiphy the total hours the tutors work each week by the number of weeks in your term. So, if you have three turors who work ten hours each in the center, simply multiphy 30 (3 X 10) times the number of weeks. A ten week term would give you a total of 300 tutor hours.

In our hypothetical model, you will be able to say to your chairperson and dean: "Last term 200 individual students attended the writing center for a total of 600 separate conferences, at an average of 30 minutes per conference. Students spent 300 hours in-conference, and tutors also spent 300 solid hours in the center." Figures such as these are quite impressive to administrators, and not only will you be able to use them to convince decision makers that your center must continue to exist, but you can base requests for new materials and additional staff on them.

FILING:

In order to collect your data you need a filing system. It is important that you maintain a file for each student, not only for data collection, but also so that you can discuss students' progress with their instructors. Some centers maintain a file folder for each student. This procedure is handy if you plan to keep copies of student papers in the pupil's file. We believe,

however, that this system is wasteful, and we use instead one file folder for each letter of the alphabet. The students are listed alphabetically within each folder. Since there are only two or three forms in a student's file and they are stapled together, it is easy to keep these files neat while saving the cost of all the extra folders.

SCHEDULING:

Scheduling student conferences is another task that must be done, hopefully by your new receptionist. An appointment system is probably the most efficient way to handle conferences because it imposes discipline on your scheduling; without an appointment system, students are liable to crowd into the center during certain times, leaving other times in which no one shows up. If you choose this system you will need an appointment sheet, on which you can record student names and the times of their appointments. Many centers use a single page with five columns for the days of the week, and horizontal rows representing 15 or 30 minute time periods. The receptionist can then record a student's name in any open slot. You can use 15 minute appointments if you are cramped, but we believe that students should receive at least 30 minutes of individual instruction if possible. Sometimes, however, you will be unable to see students for this long because of a lack of tutors or an influx of students. In this case, it is best to use your center resources: ask a student to complete an appropriate exercise from a text book while you are working with another pupil individually. You can then move back and forth between students.

It is helpful to have a graph of tutor hours somewhere near your appointment schedule. This is simply a visual aid illustrating which tutors work at what times during what days. This graph makes it easy for a receptionist, tutor, or someone else to make an appointment for a student. It is probably

best to have students work with the same tutor each visit; this adds a certain sense of continuity to the instruction students receive.

Finally, you might want to consider supplying small reminder slips for the students. We use a slip of paper the size of a business card, which says, "Your next appointment is on_____with Mr./Ms._____. Please call if you need to cancel this appointment." To construct this slip we typed it several times on a ditto master, ran it off, and cut it up. We have discovered that if students have their appointments written down, they are more likely to remember them.

HOURS OF OPERATION:

The director must determine what hours the center will remain open. Center hours are contingent partly on the hours your tutors have available. The center will be effective to a maximum if it offers broad access to students. In other words, it should be open for some time each day. Ideally, the center should be open during regular school office hours (9 to 4 perhaps), and for a few hours during two week nights. You may even be able to open for a few hours on Saturdays. It is also ideal to have double tutor coverage throughout the day, though this may be impossible with limited tutors and funds. Having two tutors working during all open hours allows you to keep one tutor free at all times for students who drop in without appointments. In this arrangement, the tutors alternate between who has unscheduled time, so that one tutor does not spend the entire day tutoring while the other does nothing.

You will probably determine your semester operating hours when you devise the tutors' schedules. Some directors believe that you should never schedule the same tutor for more than two hours at a time, because the act of tutoring is extremely exhausting, and more hours decrease the tutor's effectiveness. Others believe it is best to schedule the tutors in large blocks, say, five

hours on Monday and five on Tuesday. I usually leave this choice up to the tutors, and each feels differently about the matter.

ADVERTISING:

Another area the director is responsible for is advertising. Advertisement allows you to inform the student population of your services and is good publicity in general because it keeps you visible to faculty and administration. The extent of your publicity campaign will depend on the size of your school and on available facilities. The basic advertisement medium is the poster. You can print a flashy ad on a sheet of white legal-size paper and then photo copy it on colored paper. Some kind of illustration on the ad will catch students' eyes more than all print will. You can also type a brochure on legal-size paper and fold it in three. You can then distribute the brochure around campus.

Another medium you can employ is the faculty memo. In this notice you can inform instructors about the referral system, and you can ask them to announce the walk-in hours in their classes. A new memo every term is helpful.

Also, you can ask your tutors to visit various classes and make personal announcements. If your school does not have a student newspaper or radio station, your local media usually will run free public service announcements for you, if not larger PR articles. It is best to make these ads up-beat: "Hey! Want to improve your writing skills? Learn to write dynamic sentences? Be confident of your mechanics? Drop in to the writing center and brush up . . ." You will find that public service announcements such as this are quite useful.

No matter what medium you choose, you should include the standard disclaimer: "The writing center will not proofread your papers or help you write them, but it will help you learn editing and proofreading techniques." Even with this disclaimer many instructors will be cynical about just what you are doing in the center, and it is important to inform everyone about your policy.

Finally, it is to your benefit to over-advertise--at first. The more students you can encourage to attend the center, and the more you can encourage to return, then the more impressive your semester reports, and therefore the more indispensable your center will seem to the dean. And, what better argument can you devise for additional tutors than figures which illustrate that you are not equipped to handle the influx of students.

EXTENDED SERVICES:

Once you are in operation you can extend your services, as many centers have done, by offering various workshops in communications skills. Your tutors, or volunteers from your department, can conduct weekly or bi-weekly seminars or workshops in areas such as usage, punctuation, sentence combining, proofreading, and related areas. Each workshop can be about one to two hours in length and can be directed at students taking freshman English or to anyone interested. Extending your services in this manner not only offers students the opportunity to enrich themselves, but it helps make the writing center an indispensable part of your college.

LEARNING CENTER:

Finally, if you do not receive enough support for establishing a writing center, you may want to consider creating a "learning center." You can establish this according to the plans I have just detailed for a writing center, but the learning center services such disciplines as math and science. The benefit in creating a learning center is that you can pool the combined support and facilities of several departments toward accomplishing your goal. The learning center would help students acquire study skills applicable to all academic disciplines rather than just composition.

If you need additional assistance in establishing you center, feel free to contact me: Gary A. Olson, English Department, University of Alabama, University, AL 35486.

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